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ABSTRACT

It is crucial that educator training provide future educators with the skills and strategies to ensure gender-fair education for girls and boys from all cultures. To investigate the effect of gender bias on students, the differences between teachers in urban and rural settings must be examined. This descriptive study sought to determine the practices of elementary teachers in rural classroom situations in five South Central Missouri schools regarding gender equity as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students. The study examined interactions between teacher and student, along with participants' perceptions. In each school, two classrooms were used, and through selected random sampling, 173 students in grades 3-8 were surveyed. The principal selected the classrooms that were observed according to instructional expertise of the teacher; each teacher observed was deemed to be a master teacher based upon performance as measured by the state performance based teacher evaluations. Ten teachers and five principals were included in the surveys, observations, and interviews. Findings suggest that teachers gave females more praise while calling on males more often and asking males more higher order thinking skill questions. Thus, male students might receive more negative attention than females. Students' perceptions of which gender received more teacher attention duplicated the gender of the student. Principals overwhelmingly perceived that interactions in their "best teachers" classrooms would almost always be equal, but observations did not support that perception. While the teacher's perceptions paralleled the composition of the class regarding gender, their perceptions did not reflect the actual observed interactions. Contains 5 tables of data and 28 references. (BT)

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Administrator, Teacher, and Student Perceptions of Gender Equity Issues In Elementary Settings

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Administrator, Teacher, and Student Perceptions of Gender Equity Issues in Rural Elementary Classrooms

Although gender bias is less problematic today, it still permeates and influences our classrooms (Sadker, 1999). This situation is made even more difficult to remedy because the educational establishment is doing battle with the status quo of society as a whole. According to Cardenas (1994), the difficulty in establishing gender equity in schools is further compounded by a lower value, or even negative value, given women in the larger society. In order for the students of today to be ready for the twenty-first century, all students must be given equal educational opportunities. This means gender equity must become the norm in classrooms rather than the exception. Sound teacher training is the key to reducing sex stereotyping (Schroeder, 1998).

Furthermore, teacher education and staff development programs do little to prepare teachers to see the subtle, unintentional, but damaging gender bias that still characterizes classroom (Sadker, 1999). If teachers are unaware of biased behaviors they exhibit through verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language, they can create classroom environments that are often unfriendly or filled with limitations for both boys and girls (Sander, 1997). Schmuck (1993) after visiting 25 small school districts and interviewing 500 rural people in 21 different locations posited three pervasive myths about diversity that existed in rural schools. When asked, "how do you provide equal educational opportunity for your students"(p.4), the majority of responses were that some children cannot learn, that all children are treated the same, and that there was no problem of inequality in the schools. Schmuck concluded that equity could not exist in

rural schools until educators acknowledged and eliminated those myths by teaching educators the language of equality, by developing a school culture that dealt with inequalities, and by developing strategies to address those who are "invisible and silent" in our schools (p.4).

Studies of classrooms indicate that males and females sitting in the same classrooms may not be getting the same courses (AAUW, 1998, Shmurak & Ratliff, 1993). Boys are often asked higher order questions and are given more "Wait-time" in answering questions (Gibson, 1997). Schmurak and Ratliff (1993) noted that some of the gender inequities were pointed out by students rather than by teachers giving rise to the notion that some sensitivity may be coming from the homes rather than just the otherwise assumed preconceived biases. Further the fact that teachers' perceptions about their sensitivity to gender equity seldom matches the actual practices is another concern (Shmurak & Ratliff, 1993). Many teachers often express surprise at the gender-biased practices found in their classrooms. It is easy to slip into routines that bring about opportunities for inequity in the classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Sadker (1999) describes the inability of most teachers to detect and eliminate bias from their classrooms as gender blindness. Teachers are generally unaware of the biased behaviors they exhibit to students through their verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language. If they are unaware, this means they cannot correct themselves (Sander, 1997). When discussing gender equity, teachers tend to apologize for being unfair, favoring girls, and over compensating when making changes in the classroom (Subrahmanyan & Bozonie, 1996).

Much of the bias demonstrated by the teachers in the classroom can be traced back to the educational institutions where they received their degrees. In a recent national study of mathematics and science methods professors, Campbell and Sanders (1997) found that two-thirds of education professors spent less than two hours teaching about gender equity. Research also indicates education schools are not providing their students, the future educators, "with either the training or the experience they will need to create a gender-fair, multicultural education system" (Vendell and Dempsey, 1991, p. 3). It is crucial, therefore, that educator training, both in professional schools and in-service workshops, provides future educators with the skills and strategies they will need to ensure gender-fair education for girls and boys from all cultures. "Administrators need to learn how to go beyond policy statements to make gender fairness a top priority, to enable equal access to courses, to facilitate faculty in their efforts to provide fair counseling, curricula, textbooks, and classroom environments" (Vendell and Dempsey, 1991).

To further investigate the effect of gender bias on students, one must examine the differences between teachers in urban and rural settings. Researchers have found that teacher expectations are higher in urban areas, thus student achievement is also elevated in these areas (Jacobs, Finken, Griffen, & Wright, 1998). There is also evidence that attitudes about gender-role equity has been at the forefront of change in education and career aspirations in urban areas (Shu & Marini, 1998). Riddell (1989) using classroom observations examined the issue of why girls appear to contribute to their limited life chances in two rural comprehensive schools. She found that although most teachers said they thought that they spent equal amount of time with girls and boys in the classroom,

observations of many lessons indicated that teachers spent the majority of time with boys (see also Ebbutt, 1981). The rural teacher when made aware of those observations justified this division of her time in terms of fulfilling the boy's needs, rather than examining her own actions critically (Riddell, 1989). The changing student demographics in rural schools have contributed to a call for increased excellence and equity. The rural family structure is rapidly changing, and this has implications for the teaching strategies used by the rural educator. According to the General Accounting Office (1994), the rate of poor rural children in female-headed families increased faster than the rate for poor urban children during the 1980's. The incidence of rural female-headed household has increased from 9 percent in 1960 to 20 percent in 1990 (Lichter & Eggebeen, 1992). Further, female students who come from families in the lowest social economic quintile drop out of school at five times the rate of affluent students (Earle & Roach, 1987). Rural schools must ensure equitable educational success for all students in this rapidly changing society.

Since teachers play such a crucial part in education in providing gender equity in classroom experiences the primary purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the practices of elementary teachers in rural classroom situations in regard to gender equity as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students. Examined were the actual interactions between teacher and student, along with participants perceptions. Terry (1998) reminded us that one's perceptions influence the way one reacts to situations. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the specific teacher behaviors in the classroom including the following:

a. Are gender stereotypes perpetuated by the kinds of teacher responses given?

b. Do teachers give more attention, negative or positive or both, to one gender?

c. Do teacher expectations differ because of student gender?

2. What are the levels of student participation in classrooms?

3. Do male and female students receive equal opportunities for participation?

4. Do instructional materials used daily in the classroom adhere to guidelines for gender equity?.

Methods

Participants

Five secondary rural schools in South Central Missouri made up the population used in the research. The student enrollment for the five rural school districts ranged from 307 to 440. The county where these districts were located is a rural farming area with a population of less than 20,000. In the schools the number of free and reduced lunches ranged from 48.7 percent to 63.3 percent. In each school, two classrooms were used and through selected random sampling, 173 students were surveyed. The principal selected the classrooms that were observed on the instructional expertise of the classroom teacher. Each teacher observed was deemed to be a master teacher based upon their performance as measured by the state performance based teacher evaluations of the past four years. The student sample was comprised of 77 female students and 96 male students. Ninety-four percent of the students were Caucasian; five percent were Hispanic and less than one percent was African American. The subjects observed in the

classrooms were of a variety of disciplines including spelling, reading, language arts, social studies, and science. The students in the classrooms were in grades ranging from third to eighth grade. Two classrooms were multiage with a third/fourth grade combination and a fifth/sixth grade combination while the remaining classrooms were homogeneous in grade grouping. A total of 10 teachers and five principals were included in the surveys, observations, and interviews. One hundred percent of the 10 teachers and five administrators were Caucasian. The gender make-up of the teachers included nine females and one male while the administrators included three females and two males.

Procedures

This research was a descriptive study that investigated the instructional practices of rural elementary teachers in classroom situations in regard to gender equity based on teacher, administrators, and student perceptions and classroom observations. The same researcher designed survey instrument was given to the administrators, the teachers and to the students. The instrument consisted of 13 binary questions and was developed from a combination of the researchers' experience with gender issues and information garnered from the literature review on gender equity. Along with the survey instruments, two researcher designed observation instruments were used for data collection. Both observation instruments were patterned after the gender bias coding instrument designed by the Sadkers. One instrument dealt with Teacher Interaction, Higher Thinking Skills Questions, Gender Reinforcement, Gender Role Stereotyping, and Gender Domination. Using this instrument, the researchers did frequency counts in regard to all of the above-indicated categories and coded the data accordingly. In the Teacher Interaction category, frequency counts included positive and negative male and female Teacher Interactions.

The other observation instrument dealt with the Imbedded Discrimination in the classrooms. The categories included Language, Texts-Instructional Materials, and Visual Displays. The observer after each observation examined the extent of agreement between observations and overall tallying results. This provided a marginal check for reliability of the observations (Foster, 1996). To minimize recording errors, observation tallies were noted as they were observed and recorded before the observer left the classrooms.

Additionally, 10 percent of the teacher and student population was interviewed using a researcher-designed instrument to triangulate the data and verify the results from the questionnaires. Triangulation of findings was achieved by the use of multiple data sources, as well as by independent analysis by the investigator (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interviews continued until the researcher determined that additional questions would only provide redundant information (Boghan & Biklen, 1998).

This study was limited in the scope of coverage by the sample that was chosen. The schools selected were all located in one geographical area of one state. Therefore, some error may have been introduced into the findings due to inadequate sampling. This descriptive study may give accurate measurements of administrator, teacher and student interactions for the participants studied: however these descriptions are not necessarily representative of the total population. Additionally, while the author indicated as many possible interpretations of the date in the report as possible, there may be other plausible explanations for the data which are as yet undiscovered. Triangulation of the data was used to provide a reliable check on the validity of the observations, however there still remains the possibility of observer's bias.

Findings

Data were collected from 188 surveys, which were distributed to administrators, teachers, and students from rural school districts in the Mid-West. All 13 binary questions on the survey questionnaire had 100% response by the participants.

Each of the classrooms observed had its own special environment and student population. While some commonalties in perceptions existed between the participants, clear differences were also evident.

This first classroom analyzed was a fourth grade classroom with a class composition of 57% female and 42% male. The students in the sixth grade had a class composition of 40% female and 60% male. The subject covered during the fourth grade class was social studies with a review of geography terminology. In the sixth grade the students were studying science. The student perceptions indicated 48% female interactions and 52% male interactions in the fourth grade and 37% female interactions and 63% male interactions in the sixth grade. The fourth grade teacher perceived that females would receive 60% of the interactions and the sixth grade teacher perceived that 80% of the males would receive interactions. The administrator perceived that the fourth grade teacher would treat boys and girls equally and that the boys would dominate the interactions 70% in the sixth grade.

The observed interactions indicated 64% of the fourth grade females were called on, 77% received praise and 40%were asked to answer higher thinking skill questions. In the sixth grade 68% of the male students were called on by the teacher, while 70% of the female students received praise, yet only 25% of the female students were allowed to answer higher thinking skill questions. Females were observed doing errands and

moving about in the fourth grade room 77% more of the than the males. The teacher in the sixth grade made the comment, "The boys outnumber the girls and they demand so much attention at this age". Boys were observed dominating the classroom by calling out before the teacher recognized students with raised hands.

{Insert Table 1}

At the second school, the third and fourth grade multi-age class had nineteen students with a class composition of 56% female and 43% male. In this class the students were studying spelling and word study skills. The fifth and sixth grade multiage classroom had eighteen students with a class composition of 50% each gender. The student perceptions indicated 54% female interactions and 46% male interactions in the third/fourth grade and 56% female interactions and 44% male interactions in the fifth/sixth grade. The third/fourth grade teacher perceived that females would receive 40% of the interactions and the fifth/sixth grade teacher perceived that 66% of the males would receive interactions. The principal perceived that in the third/fourth grade classroom that the females would receive 70% of the interactions. In the fifth/sixth grade classroom the principal perceived that the boys would receive 65% of the interactions.

The observed interactions indicated that the third and fourth grade females were called on by the instructor 56%, received 51% of the praise and 22% of the higher thinking skills. In the sixth grade 53% of the males were called on by the instructor, praise was distributed evenly among the students as was the higher thinking skills. During the class period, third and fourth grade girls were observed moving about the classroom more often than the boys were. The third and fourth grade teacher made the comment, "that she called on boys and girls the same and both boys and girls answered

Observed in the third grade classroom was same sex groupings. The teacher explained later that this just happened when they rearranged the seating order recently.

{Insert Table 4}

At the last elementary school observed, the sixth grade class had a class composition of 31% female and 69% male while the eighth grade classroom composition was 38% female and 62% male. The students in the sixth grade were doing a social studies lesson. In the eighth grade the subject matter was science and the class periods observed took place both in the regular classroom and in the computer lab with students conducting electronic research.

The student perceptions indicated 31% female interactions and 69% male interactions in the sixth grade and 70% female interactions and 30% male interactions in the eighth grade. The sixth grade teacher perceived that females would receive 25% of the interactions and the eighth grade teacher perceived that 50% of the males would receive interactions. The principal perceived that in the sixth grade there would be 40% interactions with female students and in the eighth grade 59% of the interactions would be with the males.

The observed interactions indicated that 70% of the males were called on in the sixth grade, with 80% of the females receiving praise but only 25% of the higher thinking skill questions. In the eighth grade 57% of the males were called on, while 60% of the females received the praise. The distribution of higher thinking skills was more evenly distributed with 55% of the males receiving them to 45% of the females.

In the sixth grade classroom the boys performed an impromptu song that went along with the historical period that was being studied. The teacher commented that she

could not get any of the girls interested in getting up in front of the group like the boys. During the observation in the eighth grade classroom, while in the computer lab, it was observed that the males dominated during the computer lab time and were observed going to assist others with the computers twice as often as the girls. The students worked in same sex groups while at the computer stations. The teacher stressed during his interview that his classroom was equal and fair since it was an important issue to him. While little negative interactions were observed, most of what took place was with female students when they became distracted and appeared off task.

{Insert Table 5}

Overall, the student interviews indicated that 75% of the students perceived that males were more vocal and offered more opinions in the classroom. The teacher and administrators interviews indicated that boys spoke out and offered opinions more, while girls offered opinions only when they were very confidant of the answer. The student interviews also indicated that 55% of the students perceived that one gender was better at schoolwork than the other. Of those with this perception, 74% of the boys perceived that boys were better at school and 83% of the girls perceived that girls were better at schoolwork. One teacher perceived that girls did better work, while the rest of the teachers did not indicate a difference.

The analysis of gender bias for the textbooks showed gender reinforcement for males 64% of the time and for females 36% of the time. Fifty-nine percent of the students perceived that males were positively reinforced in the textbooks, while 100% of the teachers felt that the textbooks equally represented both genders. In the classrooms, displays usually were neutral in gender and often featured animal characters. Of the

classrooms observed, 50% of the teachers used the term "guys" to refer to the entire class more than once during the observation period. Three out of the five principals referred to their faculties as "guys" even though the majority of staffs were female.

Conclusions

This study was instrumental in several ways. First of all, it was found during this inquiry that these teachers gave females more praise while calling on males more often and asking males more higher thinking skill questions. Therefore, the number and kinds of teacher behavior and teacher/ student interactions taking place in the classrooms continues to perpetuate gender stereotyping in the elementary classroom. The actions of teachers of calling on boys more often and asking them higher level thinking questions supports the findings found more than a decade ago (Grayson & Martin, 1984). Also, as indicated in the majority of the classrooms observed, male students received more attention from teachers through questioning, which continues the findings of Sadker (1999) when he assessed the status of gender equity in schools. Additionally found in this study is the perception that male students might received more negative attention than that received by females since in the majority of classrooms observed the teacher gave more praise to females. Again this finding supports the data found in Grossman and Grossman (1994) and supported by Sadker and Sadker (1994). Another significant finding of the study was that student's perceptions of which gender received more attention from the teacher duplicated the gender of the student. Wrigley (1992) has supported this self-imposed gender segregation of perceptions in the past in his study. Another interesting finding from this investigation is that principals overwhelming perceived that interactions in their "best teachers" classrooms would almost always be

equal. The observations in this study did not support that perception. However, when a principal did perceive that there would be unequal representation of student interactions that generally was the case. Probably the most alarming of the findings is that while the teacher's perceptions paralleled the composition of the class regarding gender, their perceptions did not reflect the actual observed interactions. Since prior studies have determined that teacher expectations and classroom interactions influence academic achievement (Grayson & Martin, 1984) these findings should have significant impact on teacher training programs and staff development issues for school districts.

Finally, while significant strides have been made regarding gender bias free instructional materials, it appears that there is still a differentiation between how texts portray males and how contributions of both genders were not equally represented. This gender inequity supported by instructional materials parallels the work done by Sander (1997), whereby males excel in math, science, and technology, and females excel in the arts.

Because of the importance of education providing all students with the proper background to become productive and contributing citizens, it is imperative that we continue to examine the instructional practices of all teachers to assure that gender equity is being consistently practice. Institutes of higher learning must make their education students aware of the issue of gender equity in the classroom and make a concerted effort to change the statue quo. For teachers already in the profession of teaching, school district personnel must make the issue of gender equity a priority in staff development programs and services. This issue of gender bias is both educationally important and fertile for more intensive research. The question of why teacher-student interactions are

"male dominated" in the area of higher thinking questioning, while females receive more praise is an important one that should impact programming and training aspect of higher education for teachers as well as administrators. Continued rigorous research in this area might yield some insights that would benefit students of both genders.

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Table 1
Rural Elementary School One
Administrator-Student- Teacher Interaction: Gender Patterns

	Fourth Grade Class		Sixth Grade Class	
Classroom Composition	**Female** 57%(n=8)	**Male** 42%(n=6)	**Female** 40%(n=6);	**Male** 60%(n=9)
Administrator Perceived Interaction	50	50	30	70
Student Perceived Interaction	48	52	37	63
Teacher Perceived Interaction	60	40	20	80
Observed interaction**				
Who gets called on:	64	36	32	68
Who gets praised:	77	23	70	30
Who gets higher thinking skill question:	40	60	25	75

Note. n=twenty-nine students and two teachers.
**Data based on three classroom observations of fifty minutes per observation. Each classroom observed was self-contained. The values represent percentages of administrators/student/teacher interactions.

Table 2
Rural Elementary School Two
Administrator-Teacher-Student Interaction: Gender Patterns

	Third/Fourth Grade Class		Fifth/Sixth Grade Class	
Classroom Composition	**Female** 57%(n=11);	**Male** 43%(n=8)	**Female** 50%(n=9);	**Male** 50%(n=9)
Administrator Perceived Interactions	70	30	35	65
Student Perceived Interactions	54	46	56	44
Teacher Perceived Interaction	40	60	34	66
Observed Interaction*				
Who gets called on:	56	44	47	53
Who gets praised:	51	49	50	50
Who gets higher thinking skill question:	22	88	50	50

Note. n=thirty-seven students and two teachers.
*Data based on three classroom observations of fifty minutes per observation. Each classroom observed was multi-age. The values represent percentages of administrator/student/teacher interactions.

Table 3
Rural Elementary School Three
Administrator-Student-Teacher Interaction: Gender Patterns

	Fifth Grade Class		Sixth Grade Class	
Classroom Composition	**Female** 37%(n=6);	**Male** 68%(n=11)	**Female** 50%(n=9);	**Male** 50%(n=9)
Administrator Perceived Interaction	50	50	50	50
Student Perceived Interaction	35	65	36	64
Teacher Perceived Interaction	40	60	25	75
Observed Interaction*				
Who gets called on:	34	66	48	52
Who gets praised:	100	0	40	60
Who gets higher thinking skill question:	75	25	25	75

Note. n=thirty-five students and two teachers.
*Data based on three classroom observations of fifty minutes per observation. Each observed classroom was self-contained. The values represent percentages of student/teacher interactions.

Table 4
Rural Elementary School Four
Administrator-Student-Teacher Interaction: Gender Patterns

	Fourth Grade Class		Third Grade Class	
Classroom Composition	**Female** 40%(n=8);	**Male** 60%(n=12)	**Female** 43%(n=10);	**Male** 56%(n=13)
Administrator Perceived Interaction	50	50	50	50
Student Perceived Interaction	34	66	47	53
Teacher Perceived Interaction	25	75	20	80
Observed Interaction*				
Who gets called on:	40	60	42	58
Who gets praised:	65	35	70	30
Who gets higher thinking skill question:	25	75	55	45

Note. n=forty-three students and two teachers.
*Data based on three classroom observations of fifty minutes per observation. The observed classrooms were self-contained. The values represent percentages of administrators/student/teacher interactions.

Table 5
Rural Elementary School Five
Administrator-Student-Teacher Interaction: Gender Patterns

	Sixth Grade Class		Eighth Grade Class	
Classroom Composition	**Female** 31%(n=5);	**Male** 69%(n=11)	**Female** 38%(n=5);	**Male** 62%(n=8)
Administrator Perceived Interactions	40	60	59	41
Student Perceived Interaction	31	69	70	30
Teacher Perceived Interaction	25	75	50	50
Observed Interaction**				
Who gets called on:	30	70	43	57
Who gets praised:	80	20	60	40
Who gets higher thinking skill question:	25	75	45	55

Note. n=twenty-nine students and two teachers.
**Data based on three classroom observations of fifty minutes per observation. Each classroom observed was self-contained. The values represent percentages of administrator/student/teacher interactions.